SETTING GOALS

When starting a weight-loss or healthy eating plan, it is important to set a few different types of goals. You can take a look at the big picture, but you also need to give yourself stepping-stones to get there. Having smaller goals makes your long-term goals seem more attainable. Here’s a look at the different type of goals you can set for yourself:

**Long-term goals**
Give yourself a realistic goal for the next 3 to 6 months. Choose a goal that may be out of reach at the moment but is not out of the realm of possibility.

Judge for yourself what’s attainable. Some people can rise to the occasion when they set goals that seem virtually impossible; others get discouraged by setting high expectations. If you’re just starting out on a new weight-loss or healthy eating plan, set a moderately challenging goal. If you reach your goals earlier than expected, then begin to choose more ambitious ones. Here are some concrete examples of long-term goals:

- Decrease your BMI from 30 to 27 in 6 months.
- Lose 10-12 pounds in 3 months.
- Walk one mile 3 times per week.
- Run a 5K race in 6 months.

If your new weight-loss or fitness plan is going well, allow yourself a break. Life often brings unexpected obstacles. Learning to figure out ways around them is often the key to long-term success. Remember, you only fail if you don’t try. You can always cross out the old goals and try some new ones!

**Short-term goals**
Six months is a long time to wait to feel great about your accomplishments. To stay motivated, it is important to feel a sense of success along the way. Start each week by choosing a small goal. Remember that not all goals involve numbers. You might aim to eat out only one time next week. Or maybe you want to try a new class at the gym.

**Psychological goals**
These are goals for changing the way you think about yourself, about food, about exercise and about being a healthy person. Maybe your long-term goal is to improve your

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body image. Perhaps your short-term goal is to read a book on the subject or seek counseling to help you make changes you can’t make on your own.

One of the most effective ways to reach your goals is to practice visualizing what you will look like and what it will feel like when you get in shape. Post it in places where you need motivation the most, such as your freezer, desk or calendar. If you can visualize your goal, you’ll be more likely to reach it.

**Behavioral goals**
If one of your long-term goals is to achieve healthy eating habits, one of your short-term goals could be not watching television while you eat. Setting and reaching short-term goals - such as slowly chewing your food completely before you swallow it, or putting your fork down between bites, will help you get to your long-term goal. Here are some helpful behavior modification techniques you can use to eat healthier at home:

- **Pick one place to eat.** Eat there whenever you have meals or snacks at home. By doing this, you narrow the number of spots in your home that you associate food and eating.

- **Try not to do anything else while you eat.** Turn off the TV, close the magazine and hang up the phone. Now you’re ready to focus on what you’re eating and how much you’re eating. This also helps you to avoid triggers that you may subconsciously associate with food.

- **What are your triggers?** Any person, thing or activity that you associate with a certain behavior is a trigger. A common food trigger is watching TV. We’ve all experienced the TV/food association: See a delicious dessert, want that dessert, and then search the fridge for the dessert. If you can’t find it, you’ll grab anything that looks good. I’ll bet you weren’t even hungry before that commercial!

- **Set your table as if guests were coming.** In case you haven’t had company recently, a well-dressed table includes real plates, utensils, place mats and a pitcher of water. Doing so will help you pay more attention to the fact that you’re eating and you will treat the food you eat with more respect (as if you are in a fancy restaurant). Don’t snack on anything until the table setting is complete.

- **Drink a full glass of water before you begin to eat.** Drink more while you eat. You will feel fuller, without adding calories to the meal.

- **Use small plates and serve yourself small portions.** You can always go back for more. Before you know it, the smaller portions will seem normal.

- **Chew slowly and drop that fork between every bite.** Be sure to relax. The slower you eat and the more you enjoy your meal, the more likely you are to eat only a reasonable amount of food and realize when you feel full.

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Get SMART
Psychologists have found that goal-setting success increases when your goals are:

- **Specific**
- **Measurable**
- **Achievable**
- **Realistic**
- **Tangible**

**Specific** goals answer the questions how, when and where.

*Example:* “I'm going to write down my meals before I eat them at least three times this week.”

**Measurable** goals are numbers that spell out what you’ve accomplished.

*Example:* “I will walk for 25 minutes on Tuesday and Thursday.”

**Achievable** goals are attainable.

*Example:* “I will eat dessert once daily.”

Set realistic goals to avoid feeling deprived and to help to stay with your weight-loss plan.

**Realistic** goals take into account your present circumstances and are reasonable.

*Example:* “While on vacation, I will work out at least three times.” It’s great to aim high, but think about what will really fit into your life and the upcoming week or month. There are also times when life temporarily alters our plans. Celebrations, illnesses and business trips may call for a change of goals.

**Tangible** rewards! Celebrate once you reach you’re long- or short-term goals.

*Example:* “When I reach my monthly goal, I will buy that workout outfit I’ve wanted.”

You can choose anything for a goal as long as it is enjoyable, immediate and available only when the goal is met. You may want to reward yourself each time you perform a difficult new behavior. Perhaps put a dollar in a jar after each workout session or set time aside to soak in a hot tub for 30 minutes.

Food should *never* be a reward. Every food fits into a healthy, long-term weight-loss and maintenance plan. By allowing small amounts of your favorite foods, you’ll lose weight and keep it off without feeling deprived.

Check out the following links for additional inspiration:

SMART Goals:

http://www.goal-setting-guide.com/smart-goals.html
http://www.topachievement.com/smart.html

Goal Setting for Weight Loss:

http://www.consumer.gov/weightloss/setgoals.htm

Shape Up America:

http://www.shapeup.org/

Weight Control Information Network:

http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/